

Background

The child rights sector of Zimbabwe is made up of several players all working towards the well being of children. All their efforts are done in the best interests of the child and complementing government efforts. One of the challenges that the sector has had has been effective coordination of all the advocacy work that the stakeholders are doing. This can be attested by the little progress made on the issues raised in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations of 1996. The report by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1996 concluded that there was no effective coordination of all the good work by stakeholders in the Child Rights sector of Zimbabwe. At the time of publishing this Charter some of these challenges are still being experienced. It is in view of this that the Child Protection Coalition was formed whose main mandate is to have a coordinated approach to advocacy for the respect, promotion and protection of children's rights. The Coalition is made up of civil society organizations in the child rights sector. Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC) is its secretariat while Justice for Children Trust is the chair.

The Child Protection Coalition initiated this Children's Charter as an advocacy tool to continue addressing the concerns raised in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations of 1996 and other emerging issues in a coordinated way. The purpose of this Charter is to assist in coordinating, lobbying and advocacy efforts of the sector. As a wholesale document with the key elements which the children want addressed, the Charter becomes a rallying point in identifying the concerns of children. From it, a joint action plan will be drawn with government ministries and civil society organizations. The Children's Charter will essentially define issues for follow up interaction between the government, local authorities and civil society. The Charter will also play a key role in the evaluation of the child rights sector at the macro level in future.

Methodology

The Charter is a product of wide consultations with the children themselves. Through several initiatives, children around the country, primarily the junior parliamentarians, were consulted using Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC) structures countrywide. On average, three hundred (300) children participated at various platforms. A final validation workshop was then held in Harare in 2011 to consult with children from various contexts of vulnerability and these were: children living and working on the streets; children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, children living in residential care institutions; children living with disabilities; children living in farming communities and children living in remote

rural areas. This workshop's overall purpose was to triangulate what the junior parliamentarians had come up with against what other children were saying. The issues that came up were mostly similar to those that had been gotten throughout the country.

This information was collated and shared among stakeholders who made several comments and authenticated some of the submissions before getting the Charter published for presentation to government through the 2011 Junior Parliament whose opening date of the 19th Session appropriately coincided with this year's Day of the African Child: June 16, 2011. The forum presented the Child Protection Coalition with an opportune moment to present government with the Voices of the Zimbabwean Children - Children's Charter, their dreams and aspiration as they grow up to become empowered citizens of a democratic Zimbabwe.

The Child Protection Coalition is made up of the following active members: Tusanani Cover Trust, Save the Children, Legal Resources Foundation, Child Protection Society, Childline, Streets Ahead, Children First, Traditional Medical Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe, CACLAZ, Plan International, Chiedza Child Care Centre, Matthew Rusike Children's Home, Family Support Trust, SCOPE, Oasis Zimbabwe, REPSSI, Christian Care, Family Orphan Support Trust (FOST), Citizen Child, Justice AIDS Trust, ZICHISO, NANGO, FCTZ, ZACRO and Scripture Union Zimbabwe.

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0.0 PREAMBLE

We the children of Zimbabwe write this Charter to express our aspirations and expectations to the duty bearers, particularly the Government of Zimbabwe. We appreciate all the good efforts that are being done for us. We however note that these efforts are not reaching out to all children in ensuring that our rights are respected, protected and promoted. Our expectations are premised on the human rights instruments that the Government of Zimbabwe has ratified particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 1990 and the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child in January 1992. The following are the issues that we plead that attention be given to so that we can grow up to be independent and cultured citizens who will make the nation proud:

1.0 OUR EDUCATION

- 1.1 As a starting point, the National Budget should give priority to this in line with the Dakar Declaration on Education that the Government signed in April 2006.
- 1.2 We want quality education to be available for all of us despite background, location, tribe, physical status, sex and religion.
- 1.3 Primary education should be free and compulsory.
- 1.4 Counseling services must be found in all schools. Reporting mechanisms in schools to be established that are childfriendly and respond to children's needs.
- 1.5 We need career education, and more vocational training centers around the country to cater for all of us.
- 1.6 In our schools, there is no adequate infrastructure, furniture and stationery to make us learn well.
- 1.7 Some of our teachers are not qualified; we request that all our teachers be qualified.
- 1.8 Our teachers should be paid well so that they are motivated to give us quality education.
- 1.9 Some of us living with disabilities should be mainstreamed into the conventional education system than to have our schools secluded from other children.
- 1.10 We want all schools to be computerized.

2.0 OUR HEALTH

- 2.1 We must have access to quality health services and our health must be a major concern for all.

- 2.2 The National Budget should give priority to our health in line with the Abuja Declaration of July 2005 so that we live healthy lives.
- 2.3 We want access to free health services. In the event that user fees are charged, they have to be affordable for our parents and guardians.
- 2.4 All of us living with HIV and AIDS should have adequate access to Anti-Retroviral medication, more so those of us whose parents or guardians cannot afford to pay should be given the medicine for free.
- 2.5 All government hospitals must accept the Assisted Medical Treatment Order (AMTO) we are given by the Department of Social Services. There is need for effective coordination between the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and the Ministry of Labour and Social Services to reach a consensus on the issue of AMTOs so that we will not be disadvantaged.
- 2.6 We are requesting that we be immunized despite religious beliefs of our parents.
- 2.7 We request that there be adequate medical personnel and supplies in all hospitals and clinics in the country especially in the rural areas.
- 2.8 We ask that we have clean water and sanitation especially in rural areas.
- 2.9 The Government should build satellite clinics in rural areas to reduce walking distances to hospitals and clinics.

3.0 SAFETY, CARE AND PROTECTION

- 3.1 We want to be protected from all forms of abuse.
- 3.2 There should be stiffer penalties for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. We request that all the perpetrators of offences like rape and aggravated indecent assault be incarcerated for at least twenty years.
- 3.3 Rape Kits must be readily available in all health centres around the country so that children who experience sexual abuse will efficiently and promptly get assistance.
- 3.4 Cases of child sexual abuse must be dealt with expeditiously at the courts.
- 3.5 All duty bearers must be trained in victim friendly approaches to uphold children.
- 3.6 Teachers who abuse children must not be allowed to work in the education system again. A record of offenders must be kept to monitor reoffending and protection of victims.

4.0 IDENTITY

- 4.1 Birth certificates, national identity documents and passports must be easily accessible for us as children.
- 4.2 Schools should facilitate that children without birth certificates can be registered.
- 4.3 All hospitals and clinics should issue birth certificates for newly born babies.
- 4.4 The birth registration process should be flexible to consider the situation of some of us who are Orphans.
- 4.5 The Birth and Deaths Registration Act should have a provision that entails that every child born in Zimbabwe should be issued with a birth certificate even if the parents are foreigners.
- 4.6 The government should ensure that we be given good names that uplift us instead of ridiculing names.

5.0 EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

- 5.1 We do not want to be discriminated against on the basis of any impairment.
- 5.2 Government should ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.
- 5.3 We should have access to free legal services in cases of our rights being violated.
- 5.4 We want to participate fully in all activities in society without being alienated.
- 5.5 Braille and sign language should be made compulsory to all citizens if we are to be successfully integrated in society.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE CARE

- 6.1 We want to be adequately prepared for time of discharge from residential child care institutions.
- 6.2 We should be equipped with skills that prepare us for an independent life after institutionalization.
- 6.3 The Department of Social Services should fulfill its mandate of providing us with support whilst in residential care, monitoring our progress and the care we are receiving.
- 6.4 All residential child care institutions should receive financial assistance from government for their operations.
- 6.5 All of us in residential care institutions must have free access to education.

7.0 HARMFUL TRADITIONAL AND FAITH PRACTICES

- 7.1 We request that the Government outlaws traditional and faith practices that infringe our rights forthwith.
- 7.2 Protect us from harmful traditional and faith practices such as *kugarwa nhaka*, forced marriages especially in the apostolic sects and being forced into a marriage in order to bear children for an infertile relative (*chigadzamapfihwa*).
- 7.3 Belief practices that encourage people to rape virgin girls and children with disabilities should be stopped by making stiffer penalties for perpetrators to discourage this.

8.0 ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- 8.1 We want pretrial diversion to be fully operational for us when we are in contact with the law.
- 8.2 Probation officers should represent us in line with the Children's Act so that we will not be dealt with like adults.
- 8.3 Police handling abuse cases should not discriminate against us on the basis of where we come from. Some of us living on the streets are usually victimized on the basis of our status.

9.0 FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

- 9.1 We want a pollution free environment.
- 9.2 There must be more recreational facilities that are safe for us.
- 9.3 We want clean water and proper sanitation facilities in all public places and especially in rural areas.
- 9.4 Refuse collection should be prompt and proper sewerage should be maintained.

10.0 LABOUR

- 10.1 There should be zero tolerance to child labour and perpetrators must be brought to book.

11.0 INFORMATION

- 11.1 We want access to information that positively affects our wellbeing.
- 11.2 Promote our talents regardless of backgrounds.

12.0 GOVERNANCE

- 12.1 We must not be forced into political activities. During elections, we should not be forced to attend political functions.
- 12.2 We must be allowed to attend school even on days when there are political activities where we come from.

13.0 OUR PARTICIPATION

- 13.1 We want to exercise our right to participation and give our opinions in decision making at all levels.
- 13.2 Government should make sure that there is equal distribution of resources to all categories of children including some of us with disabilities and some from marginalized societies.
- 13.3 There should be a budget for the junior parliament.
- 13.4 The junior parliament must not be a decorative structure but it must be fully supported to be functional.
- 13.5 We want to be well informed of all positive developments at whatever level of development of our country.

14.0 LIVING ON THE STREETS

- 14.1 We want appropriate shelter.
- 14.2 We need protection from all forms of abuse.

15.0 CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

- 15.1 The Government should research on the state of corporal punishment in our schools, in the home and the country's penal system and its compliance with ratified human rights instruments and promulgated laws.
- 15.2 The Government should further explore on alternative forms of disciplining us that uphold our humanity and respect our inherent dignity.

16.0 FRIENDLY BUDGETS

- 16.1 We must be consulted in coming up with the national budget.
- 16.2 The National Budget should address our concerns in a holistic manner.

17.0 ADMINISTRATION OF OUR ISSUES

- 17.1 Our issues must be housed under one ministry to make coordination more effective.
- 17.2 There must be harmony in the laws that govern our rights.
- 17.3 The Government must ensure full implementation of laws and policies that affect us so that we will benefit to the maximum.

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that action will be taken to address what we have highlighted in this Charter. We look forward to a future where all efforts of all stakeholders will be done in our best interests. Our desire is to grow up in a safe environment that nurtures us to live independent and full lives so that we can contribute to the development of our country using the diversity of our gifts. We also commit to observe our responsibilities that come with these rights.